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ABSTRACT

This guide is designed to help parents gain a better understanding of testing and its role in the education of their children. It answers the following questions: (1) What are standardized tests? (2) What do standardized test scores tell me about my child? (3) How are standardized test scores used? (4) What are the limitations of standardized tests? (5) What is a criterion-referenced test, and how is it different from a norm-referenced test? (6) What are minimum competency tests? (7) What can parents do to help? (8) Are there legal rights for parents and students on testing? (9) What do test items look like? and (10) What are some other sources of information on testing? (Author/RL)

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YOUR CHILD AND TESTING

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The National Institute of Education
U.S. Department of Education
Washington, D.C.

YOUR CHILD AND TESTING

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FOREWORD

Dear Parents,

The National Institute of Education, U.S. Department of Education, is pleased to present this booklet titled **Your Child and Testing.** It is designed to help you gain a better understanding of testing and its role in the education of your children. It is our belief that an understanding of testing, its uses, and its limitations will promote a better relationship between you, your child and the school.

This booklet contains answers to questions such as these: What are the different types of tests that my child takes in school? What are the differences among these tests? How are the test results used? What do the scores mean? How do they affect my child? How can I help?

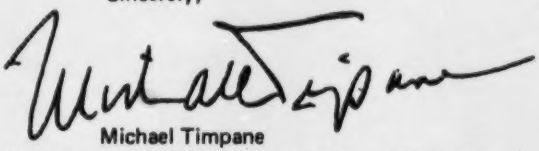
It also contains questions you might want to ask your child's teachers, principal or other school administrators about testing, as well as a brief explanation of your legal rights. We've listed some additional sources of information on topics addressed in this booklet, and provided some sample test questions.

You should realize, however, that testing is only part of the information needed to form a complete picture of your child's strengths and weaknesses. Many other talents and interests are not measured by tests but are an important part of your child's profile.

We'd like to express our thanks to the teachers of the Washington, D.C., Public Schools who reviewed the booklet, and to the test publishers who provided the sample test items. This booklet was written by Enid Herndon, Senior Associate with NIE's Testing Team. The illustrations were done by Terry Pratt. Barbara Brown did the typesetting and Claudia Perry helped with the final editing.

Jeff Schiller, Assistant Director for Testing, Assessment and Evaluation, and Mary Arsenoff, Education Coordinator, Consumer Information Center, initiated the project, and Judy Shoemaker, Testing Team Leader, directed its production. Kathryn Brown, Government Services Administration, Consumer Information Center, was helpful throughout its development.

Sincerely,



Michael Timpane
Director, National Institute of Education

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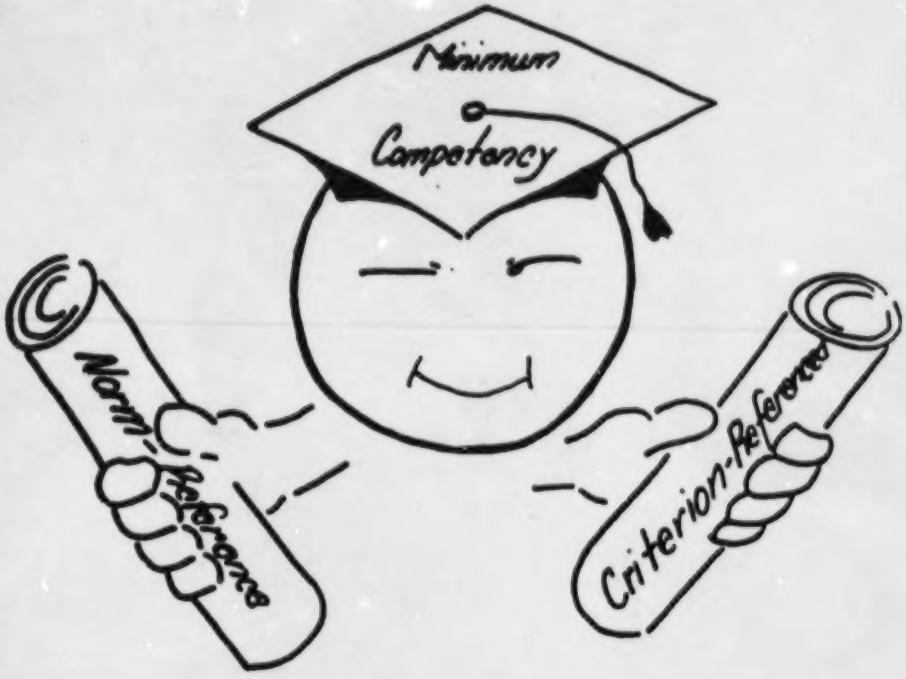
Why Test?

Children take many different kinds of tests in school: standardized achievement and aptitude tests, diagnostic tests, minimum competency tests, as well as teacher-made tests. What are the differences among all these tests? How are they used? What do the scores mean? Is all this testing really necessary? How do these tests affect my child? How can I help my child with testing? These are some questions parents ask about testing and how it will affect their children.

The basic reason for testing in the schools is to improve education. Testing can give information to teachers and other officials to help them make decisions about how to improve education. Different types of tests are used to give different types of information. Some of this information is used to determine how well your child is doing in school. Some is used to evaluate education programs. Other information is used to report to the public on how well schools are doing.

This guide is designed to help parents gain a better understanding of testing and its role in the education of their children. It is our belief that a better understanding of testing its uses, and its limitations will promote a better working relationship between the parent, the school, and the child.

What Should Parents Know About the Different Types of Tests?



Most of the tests your child takes in school are teacher-made or teacher-selected tests and textbook quizzes. These are short tests or quizzes which the teacher gives to find out how much students are learning about what is being taught in the classroom. They let the teacher know whether or not students are ready to move on to the next unit or level of a subject. Classroom tests are often used along with other information to determine students' grades in school.

Classroom tests provide one way of looking at your child's progress in school. Other tests provide information that can be useful in different ways. It should be kept in mind that the tests covered in this guide do not measure everything that is taught in school. Your child may have interests and talents that cannot be measured by a test. You should meet regularly with your child's teacher to find out how your child is progressing in these other learning areas.

What Are Standardized Tests?

In order to determine if school programs are succeeding, there must be some standard or yardstick to measure that success against. One way parents measure their children's success is by the grades they get in school subjects. A grade of C tells you that the work your child is doing in a subject is about average for what is expected. A grade of B tells you that your child's work is above average, D below average, and so on. These grades show how your child is doing in school in relation to the teacher's expectations or standards for successful performance. These standards of performance are not the same everywhere. Different teachers often have different expectations for their students.

Other educators need to make decisions that involve looking at the performance of students from class to class, school to school, or school district to school district. In order to do this they must make sure each student's performance is measured according to the same standards. A standardized test is designed to provide such a uniform measure of student performance. Everyone takes the test according to the same directions and according to the same rules. This makes it possible to measure each student's performance against the performance of other students who have taken the same test. The group of students with whom a student's performance is compared is called a norm group. The norm group consists of many students of the same age or the same grade who took the same test.

- **Standardized tests give information about how students in a given class, school, or school system are doing in relation to other students.**

There are two major types of standardized tests which your child may take in school: Achievement Tests and Aptitude Tests.

A. Achievement Tests

Achievement tests are designed to measure how much students have already learned about school subjects. They are designed to show educators how well students are doing in school subjects as compared to other students. The information can help education program suited to students' achievement in each school subject.

Achievement tests measure performance in subjects such as reading, mathematics, language, spelling, social studies, and science.

- **Standardized achievement tests measure how much students have already learned about school subjects as compared to other students.**

B. Aptitude Tests

Aptitude tests are designed to measure a student's ability to learn in school. They are designed to tell the teacher and other school officials how well a student is likely to do in future school work. This information can help school officials to plan instruction that will not be too easy or difficult for the student to handle. There are aptitude tests for clerical ability, verbal ability, mechanical ability, creativity, abstract reasoning, and so on.

Aptitude tests do not measure subjects taught in school such as reading and mathematics. Rather, aptitude tests measure a broad range of abilities or skills that are considered to be important for success in school subjects. For example, students who do well on an aptitude test of verbal ability (the understanding and use of word symbols) are likely to do well in school subjects that require verbal ability, such as reading, language, and social studies.

The most familiar kind of aptitude test is called an I.Q. Test. I.Q. stands for Intelligence Quotient. I.Q. tests are designed to predict a student's overall ability to learn in school. Educators and parents should not put too much importance on a child's I.Q. score as an absolute measure of what a child is or is not able to do. There are many things that may affect a child's I.Q. score besides his/her aptitude. Performance on any aptitude test including I.Q. tests is highly dependent on skills a child has learned in the past. To a large extent, aptitude tests measure learned skills rather than innate abilities. Because of this high relationship between past achievement and performance on aptitude tests, many educators are using only achievement tests.

- **Aptitude tests measure a student's ability to learn school subjects. They predict the likelihood of future success in school as compared to other students.**

- **Performance on aptitude tests is highly dependent on past achievement.**

C. Examples of Standardized Tests

Standarized tests are generally not made by school officials in your child's school district. They are made by commercial test publishers for use in many school districts across the country. The following are examples of commercial standardized tests which your child may take in school.

(You may want to have your child's teacher check ☑ the tests your child takes for your reference.)

Aptitude Tests

☐ California Test of Mental Maturity
CTB/McGraw-Hill
Del Monte Research Park
Monterey, California 93940

☐ Cognitive Abilities Test
Riverside Publishing Co.
P.O. Box 1970
Iowa City, Iowa 52244

☐ Cooperative School & College Ability Tests
Cooperative Tests & Services
Educational Testing Service
Princeton, New Jersey 08540

☐ Developing Cognitive Abilities Test
Scott, Foresman and Co.
1900 East Lake Avenue
Glenview, Illinois 60025

☐ Differential Aptitude Tests
The Psychological Corporation
757 3rd Avenue
New York, New York 10017

☐ Henman-Nelson Tests of Mental Ability
Riverside Publishing Co.
P.O. Box 1970
Iowa City, Iowa 52244

☐ Lorge-Thorndike Intelligence Tests
Riverside Publishing Co.
P.O. Box 1970
Iowa City, Iowa 52244

☐ Otis-Lennon Mental Ability Test
The Psychological Corporation
757 3rd Avenue
New York, New York 10017

☐ Short Form Test of Academic Aptitude
CTB/McGraw-Hill
Del Monte Research Park
Monterey, California 93940

☐ Stanford Binet I.Q. Test
Riverside Publishing Co.
P.O. Box 1970
Iowa City, Iowa 52244

☐ Wechsler Intelligence Scale for Children
The Psychological Corporation
757 3rd Avenue
New York, New York 10017

☐ Wechsler Preschool & Primary Scale of Intelligence
The Psychological Corporation
757 3rd Avenue
New York, New York 10017

☐ Other _____
_____
_____

Achievement Tests

☐ American School Achievement Tests
The Bobbs-Merrill Co.
4300 West 62nd Street
Indianapolis, Indiana 46268

☐ California Achievement Tests
CTB/McGraw Hill
Del Monte Research Park
Monterey, California 93940

☐ CAP Achievement Series
Scott, Foresman and Co.
1900 East Lake Avenue
Glenview, Illinois 60025

☐ Comprehensive Tests of Basic Skills
CTB/McGraw-Hill
Del Monte Research Park
Monterey, California 93940

☐ Iowa Tests of Basic Skills
Riverside Publishing Co.
P.O. Box 1970
Iowa City, Iowa 52244

☐ Iowa Tests of Educational Development
Science Research Associates, Inc.
155 N. Wacker Drive
Chicago, Illinois 60606

☐ Metropolitan Achievement Tests
The Psychological Corporation
757 3rd Avenue
New York, New York 10017

☐ Sequential Tests of Educational Progress
Cooperative Tests and Services
Educational Testing Service
Princeton, New Jersey 08540

☐ SRA Achievement Series
Science Research Associates Inc.
155 N. Wacker Drive
Chicago, Illinois 60606

☐ Stanford Achievement Tests
The Psychological Corporation
757 3rd Avenue
New York, New York 10017

☐ Scholastic Achievement Test
Scholastic Testing Service, Inc.
480 Meyer Road
Bensenville, Illinois 60106

☐ Other _____
_____
_____
_____

What Do Standardized Test Scores Tell Me About My Child?

Both types of standardized tests, achievement and aptitude, measure how your child compares with students of the same age or grade who took the same test. This comparison group is called a norm group. Test scores that compare students to a norm group are called norm-referenced test scores.

In order to understand your child's norm-referenced test scores, it is important to know what students make up the norm group. Generally, a national norm group is used to show how students in a given class, school or district compare to other students from all across the country. Norm-referenced test scores may also show how students compare to special, more limited groups of students. A norm group may consist of students within a given state, local school district, or students in large city schools.

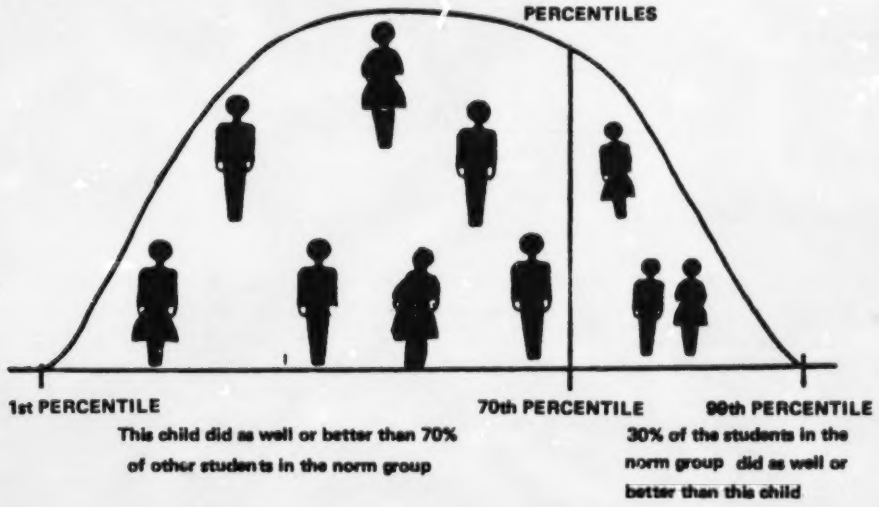
A. Raw Scores

The raw score is the basic score that describes a student's test performance. It usually means the exact number of questions your child answered correctly. This score means relatively little by itself. But when the raw score is compared with the raw scores of students in the norm group, it can be expressed in a number of different ways that tell how your child's performance compares with other students. The percentile rank score, the stanine, the grade equilvalent, and the I.Q. are the most common norm-referenced test scores.

B. Percentile Rank Scores

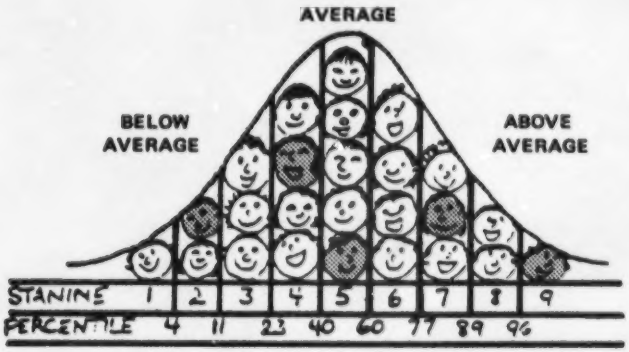
The precentile rank score shows where a student's test performance placed or ranked in relation to the performance of other students who took the test. It tells what percent of the students in the norm group did better and what percent did not do as well. Percentile ranks start at 1 and go to 99. A percentile rank score of 70 means that the student scored as well as or better than 70 percent of all children who took the test. It also means that 30 percent of the children who took the test scored as well or better than this student. It *does not* mean that the student answered 70 percent of the questions correctly.

Standardized tests are not perfect measures of aptitude or achievement. Small differences in percentile scores do not mean necessarily that there are actual differences in student aptitude or achievement. Caution should be used whenever norm-referenced test scores are used to help make decisions about individual students. A percentile score is only one way of looking at a student's progress in school.


PERCENTILES
1st PERCENTILE
This child did as well or better than 70% of other students in the norm group
70th PERCENTILE
99th PERCENTILE
30% of the students in the norm group did as well or better than this child

C. Stanines

A stanine score is a more general measure of how a student is doing than a percentile score. Stanine scores range from 1 to 9. Each stanine score includes many percentile rank scores. For example, a stanine score of 6 includes all of the students who scored between the 60th and 77th percentile ranks. Even though one student may have scored at the 61st percentile rank and another at the 76th, both of these students would have a stanine score of 6. Differences in stanine scores are in many ways easier to understand than percentiles. Differences of more than one stanine are more likely to mean real differences in aptitude or achievement. Stanine scores of 4, 5, and 6 are considered to be average. Scores of 1, 2, and 3 are below the average scores of other children, and scores of 5, 6, and 7 are above average.



D. Grade Equivalents

A grade equivalent score is another way of comparing the performance of students. It is an achievement test score that shows whether the child's performance is above, below, or the same as other students in his/her grade. Grade equivalents are very often misunderstood. They should not be used to tell what grade a child should be in, or the level of work a child should be given.

If your child is in the fourth month of the fourth grade, a score of 4.4 means that your child is doing about as well as other students in the fourth grade. A score of 8.0 means that your child is doing much better than other students in the 4th grade. It does not mean that your child knows as much as eighth graders, or is ready to do eighth grade work. If you wanted to know how your child compared with eighth graders, your child would have to take a standardized test for eighth grade students. Similarly, if a fourth grade child scores at 2.0, it does not mean that the child belongs in the second grade. (S)he may only need extra help from the teacher.

Like percentile rank scores, small differences in a student's grade equivalent scores do not necessarily mean real differences in achievement. These small differences can be caused simply by answering one or two more test questions correctly or incorrectly.

E. I.Q. Scores

An I.Q. score is an aptitude score that is often misunderstood. An I.Q. score is just another type of score that is used to show where a student's performance ranks in comparison with other student's scores. I.Q. scores are not a direct measure of intellectual or innate ability.

An average I.Q. score is around 100. An I.Q. score above 116 is considered to be above average. An I.Q. score below 84 is below average.

How Are Standardized Test Scores Used?

Test results are used in different ways by different people. Teachers might look at the average test score for the whole class to find out:

- Is the performance of this class above or below the average performance of other children in this school district?
- How does my class compare to other students in the country?
- In what areas does this class do best? In what areas is the class having difficulty?

Teachers sometimes compare achievement scores with aptitude scores to determine if the class is achieving above or below what their average aptitude score would indicate. They may also look at individual test scores to identify those children who appear to need extra help and those who appear to be doing better than the rest of the class.

It is important to note that test scores can only give the teacher a general idea of how students are doing in a subject. But this general information can be very useful. The teacher may use this information to help make decisions about which materials and teaching styles would be most effective for the class.

The principal can use test scores to make similar decisions about the whole school. The principal may want to know at which grade levels students appear to be having difficulty, and in which subjects. The principal can then make decisions about how best to help teachers improve instruction.

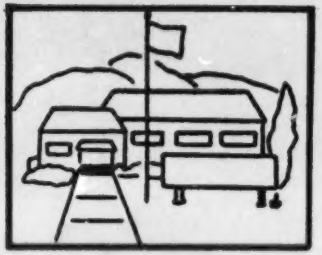
Other school administrators, the superintendent, and the school board look at test scores and other information to make decisions about the whole school system.

- Has student achievement gone up or down over time?
- Which school programs appear to be working best?
- In what subject areas do the schools appear to need additional support in terms of money and materials?

Standardized test scores can help provide answers to these questions so that administrators can make decisions about the kinds of changes that need to be made to improve educational programs. Standardized test scores are also one way school officials give information to parents and to the community about how school programs area doing.

TEST SCORES

HERE'S HOW THEY'RE USED



TO COMPARE ACHIEVEMENT LEVELS IN SCHOOLS WITHIN THE DISTRICT

TO SELECT THE BEST LEARNING MATERIALS AND TEACHING STYLES

TO COMPARE STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT WITH OTHER STUDENTS IN THE STATE OR COUNTRY

TO INFORM PARENTS AND THE COMMUNITY ABOUT HOW THE SCHOOLS ARE DOING

TO IMPROVE THE TOTAL LEARNING SYSTEM

Standardized tests give only a general indication of an individual student's aptitude and achievement. They are not designed to be used as the only basis for making decisions about individual students.

Standardized tests are only one way teachers can get information about students. Other ways include:

- o observing students in and out of the classroom;
- o talking to students and listening to what they have to say;
- o meeting with parents to discuss their child's progress;
- o evaluating students day to day classwork;
- o keeping records of how each student changes and grows during the year.

It is important to remember that more than test scores are needed to form a complete picture of how a child is doing in school. Tests by themselves tell only part of the story.

In most schools, teachers are given special training to learn about tests so that they will understand their proper use. Some school districts require teachers to take a course in testing before they can become teachers. Some school districts give teachers on-the-job training in how to give tests and use test results.

You, as a parent, may wish to talk with your child's teachers and principal to learn about the standardized tests your child takes and how they are used to help improve your child's education.

Ask the principal:

1) What tests will my child take this year? How will these tests be used?

2) How do students in this school generally compare to students in other schools in our system? How do they compare to other students across the country?

3) Is the school doing anything to give students practice in taking tests?

4) Have the teachers had any special training in testing?

5) Are there any workshops or conferences planned to help parents understand tests?

6) What steps have been taken by the test maker to reduce cultural bias in the tests my child will take?

What Are the Limitations of Standardized Tests?

A standardized test is not a perfect measure of what an individual student can or can not do. There are many situations that may affect a student's test score. Was the student having a bad day? Were the test directions explained clearly? Was the room comfortable and quiet? Did the student guess when (s)he didn't know the answer?

A certain amount of error or inaccuracy is part of every student's score. If a student were to take the test again with no new classwork, his/her score probably would not be exactly the same. It is expected that the student's score would fall somewhere within a specified range of scores. This specified range or band of scores is called a standard error of measurement. The standard error of measurement always must be considered when scores are used to make decisions about individual students. The student's score should be interpreted as falling within a range of scores, not as an exact score.

Group scores, such as a class average, are less subject to this kind of error than individual student scores. This is because group scores include the scores of many different students. The low score of a student who didn't feel well during the test may be balanced by the high score of a student who answered some questions right by chance.

Another concern about standardized tests is whether a test is culturally biased. If a test is culturally biased, students from different racial, ethnic or socio-economic backgrounds may perform differently from other students. They may not be as familiar with the way test questions are worded because their experiences may be different. In such cases the test may not be as accurate a measure of student's aptitude or achievement as it is for other students. Not all group differences in test performance are due to test bias; some differences reflect real differences in achievement and opportunity to learn. Most test publishers have taken steps in recent years to reduce cultural bias in tests. Still, it is important for school officials to consider this factor in selecting tests and when test scores are used to make decisions about individual students.

The biggest problem with standardized tests is their misuse. The most common misuse is using these tests as the primary basis for classifying, labeling, or placing students in a fixed track or special class. Standardized test scores should not be used alone to:

- label a student as incapable of learning;
- place a student in a grade;
- give students report card grades;
- identify the specific skills a student needs to learn; or
- place a student in a track, gifted class, remedial class, or special education class without using other information about the child.

7) Are the tests given in the language we speak at home?

Questions to ask the teacher:

1) What do my child's test results mean?

2) What students make up the norm group?

3) Are my child's test results consistent with his/her classroom performance? Is my child working above, below, or at grade level in his/her classroom?

4) Do these tests measure what you are teaching in the classroom? Do they measure what the test publishers claim they measure?

5) What other tests will you use to find out specifically what my child needs to learn?

6) What other ways do you plan to evaluate my child's progress?

7) What do you plan to do to help my child where (s)he is weak?

8) What is being done to make sure my gifted child stays motivated and interested in school work?

9) What can I do at home to help?

Questions to ask the teacher, counselor, or principal about special placement outside the regular classroom or in an instructional track:

1) How do you determine if my child needs special placement?

2) What tests will be used? How will you determine the score that shows (s)he needs special help? How can you be sure the test score is correct?

3) What other information about my child will you use to decide if (s)he needs a special placement?

4) What special instruction will be given my child as a result of this placement?

5) What other tests will be given my child to determine his/her individual needs?

6) How will you evaluate his/her progress?

7) How will you know when my child no longer needs special instruction? Will (s)he be returned to the regular program?

8) Does this placement label my child in any way?

9) What can I do at home to help?

Keep in mind, just as standardized test scores by themselves should not be used to judge your child, test scores of a class should not be used as the basis for evaluating your child's teacher. It is important for you to work with the teacher to ensure the best education for your child.

Talk With Your Child's Teacher
to Get a Better Understanding
of Testing in the Schools.

What Is a Criterion-Referenced Test and How Is It Different From a Norm-Referenced Test?

So far we have focused on standardized tests. We discussed the difference between two types of standardized tests, aptitude and achievement. We said that an aptitude test primarily measures a student's ability to learn and an achievement test measures what a student has already learned. We said that both tests are norm-referenced because test scores show how a student's performance compares with the performance of other students in a norm group.

There is also another kind of achievement test called a criterion-referenced test. These are achievement tests because they measure what students already have learned. Criterion-referenced tests generally are not called standardized tests because they are not always given to everyone according to the same or "standardized" procedures, and they do not compare a student's performance to a norm group.

There is not always agreement among educators on the differences between norm-referenced achievement tests and criterion-referenced tests. The following are differences most often discussed.

Like norm-referenced achievement tests, criterion-referenced tests measure what a student already has learned about the subjects taught in school. Criterion-referenced tests, unlike norm-referenced achievement tests, give specific information about what an individual student has or has not learned. For example, does the student use zeros properly in multiplication? Can the student read a story and recall the sequence of events, identify the main idea, or draw conclusions? Criterion-referenced tests are sometimes called diagnotic tests, because they help show the teacher what skills within a subject a student still needs to learn.

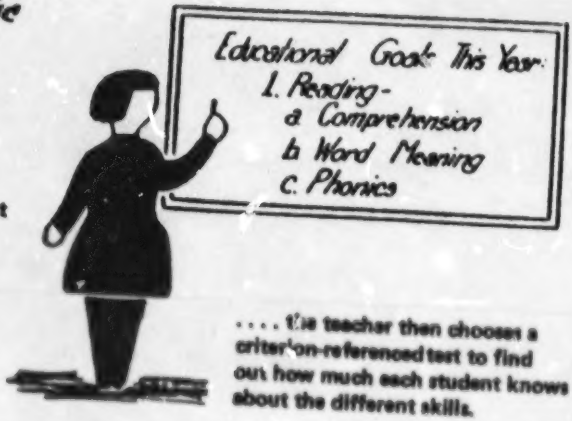
Norm-referenced achievement tests on the other hand give more general information about how students perform on broad areas of a subject.

- **A norm-referenced achievement test is designed to measure broad areas of a subject. Scores indicate where a student stands in relation to other students.**

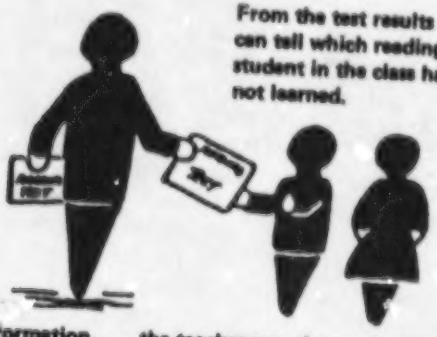
- **A criterion-referenced test is designed to measure specific skills within a subject area. Test results indicate which skills a student has or has not learned.**

The Story of the Criterion-Referenced Test

The teacher has a plan of what students should learn in reading skills



. . . . the teacher then chooses a criterion-referenced test to find out how much each student knows about the different skills.



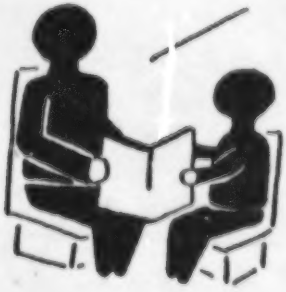
From the test results the teacher can tell which reading skills each student in the class has and has not learned.

With this information. . . . the teacher can plan each child's individual learning program. . . .

Sam is placed in a group of students that will read short stories on their own and make book reports.

Maria is placed in a group of students developing their word meaning skills.

Carl is given special help from the teacher to improve his phonics skills.



A teacher uses the information obtained from a criterion-referenced test to plan the child's individual learning program. The child is tested with criterion-referenced tests throughout the year to see how well the learning program has worked and how it should be changed to meet new educational goals.

- **Norm-referenced achievement tests are best used to help make educational decisions about groups of students.**

- **Criterion-referenced tests provide useful information to help make decisions about individual students.**

Like norm-referenced tests, criterion-referenced tests may be developed by commercial test publishers. In addition, some state departments of education and local school districts have developed their own criterion-referenced tests. In this way they can be sure the tests measure the specific skills state or local school officials feel are important to teach, which is not always possible with commerically available tests.

Criterion-referenced tests are a valuable tool for teachers because they help show what each child needs to learn. But there are limits to every test. No one test should be taken as the final word of what your child can or cannot do. Not everything that your child learns in school can be measured by a paper and pencil test. Teachers use a variety of ways to find out what students need to learn and to evaluate student progress.

To understand your child's criterion-referenced test results it may be helpful for you to meet with the teacher to discuss the following:

1. What are the skills my child is expected to learn this year?

2. What are the specific things that my child already has learned? What does (s)he need to learn?

3. Do these tests measure all of what you plan to teach?

4. What other ways will you evaluate my child's progress?

5. Do you have an individual plan of instruction for my child? May I see it?

6. How often will you test my child to find out what more (s)he has learned?

7. Will I receive a progress report to keep me informed of what my child is learning and where (s)he is having difficulty?

8. What can I do at home to help?

Most states and local school districts have set standards of what they expect students to have learned by the time they finish high school. These standards consist of tasks or behaviors believed to be necessary to meet the minimum demands of adult life.

Examples:

- To write a paragraph using proper punctuation;
- To make the correct change;
- To balance a check-book;
- To write a letter to a friend;
- To fill out a job application;
- To read and follow direction.

These tasks or the ability to perform these tasks are called competencies. Tests that measure a student's ability to perform these tasks are called minimum competency tests. Most minimum competency tests are also criterion-referenced. They show what a student has learned and what a student still needs to learn. Generally, a total score is used to determine if a student has achieved at an acceptable minimal level.

Some states and local school systems now require students to pass a minimum competency test before they can receive a high school diploma. When a student fails to pass the minimum competency test (s)he should be given special help. In some schools the student is placed in a special class or course to receive this additional help.

Some state and local school systems have identified competencies that students are expected to have at every grade level, or at certain grade levels. In some cases, students must take minimum competency tests at several different grades beginning in elementary school. This periodic testing gives school personnel information to monitor each student's progress. They can tell if a student is falling behind and needs special help long before (s)he reaches high school.

It is important for you, the parent, and your child to know what the competency requirements are in your state or local school system. You should find out this information as soon as your child enters school so that you can monitor your child's progress at each grade level to make sure needed competencies are being learned. Contact the principal at your child's school or your local board of education. You might wish to ask these questions:

1. What are the competency requirements for this school district?
2. Are there specific competencies required at each grade level?
3. What are the specific competencies required for graduation?
4. Who helped decide these competencies were the most important ones to teach?
5. Are these competencies actually being taught in school?
6. Are all students required to pass a minimum competency test to receive a diploma? Are there any exceptions? If my child, passes the test can (s)he graduate early?
7. At what grades are the tests given? How many times can a student take the test in order to pass?
8. What score is required to pass? How is this score determined?
9. If my child does not pass, what special help will be given?
10. What alternatives does a student have, if (s)he is unable to pass the test?
11. What action can be taken, if I, the parent do not think the test score gives a true picture of my child?
12. How can I monitor my child's progress from now until the test is given to make sure (s)he is ready to past the test?
13. Have the minimum competency tests been screened for culturally biased items?
14. Will the test be given in the language that we speak at home?

Additionally, it may be helpful for you to meet with your child's teacher at the beginning of each year to find out what competencies will be taught and how you can work with the school to support instruction and monitor your child's progress.

What Can I Do To Help?

Here are several tips which may help you to help your child:

- Try not to be overly anxious about test scores. Too much emphasis on test scores can be upsetting to children.

- Give your child encouragement. Praise him/her for the things (s)he does well. A child who feels good about him/herself will do his/her best. A child who is afraid of failing is more likely to make a mistake.

- Don't judge your child on the basis of a test score. Test scores are not perfect measures of what your child can do. There are many other things that might influence a test score; how the child is feeling, the setting in the classroom, and the attitude of the teacher are just a few. Remember also any one test tells only part of the story.

- Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss your child's progress. Parents and teachers should work together to benefit the child.

- Ask the teacher to suggest activities for you to do with your child at home that will help your child prepare for tests and improve his/her understanding of school work.

- Make sure your child attends school regularly. Remember tests do reflect the over-all achievement of your child. The more often your child is in a learning situation, the more likely (s)he will do well on tests.

- Make sure your child completes his/her assigned homework. Homework is an important way that teachers help students learn. Try to provide a comfortable and quiet working environment for the child at home.

- Make sure your child is well rested on school days and especially the day of a test. Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or to handle the demands of a test.

- See that your child has a well rounded diet. A healthy body leads to a healthy, active mind. Most schools provide free breakfast and lunch for students who qualify. For information, you should contact the principal at your child's school.

- Provide a variety of books and magazines for your child to read at home. Through reading new materials your child will learn new words (s)he might see on a test.

Additionally, you should know the policies and practices of your school system that affect testing and the use of test scores.

- Find out which tests your child will take and for what purposes. The school principal or counselor should provide you with a schedule of testing for the year and explain the use of those tests. Contact your school board to find out about tests that may be required by the state.

- Find out whether your school system has prepared the staff to understand testing. School personnel must be trained adequately in order to understand and use test information properly.

- Find out whether your child's school gives students practice in taking tests. Are practice exercises used to make sure students are familiar with directions and test format? Such practice is part of good test administration.

Are There Legal Rights for Parents and Students on Testing?

You and your child do have important rights in relation to testing in the schools. Some of these rights may be guaranteed by the laws of your state or local school district. To find out about your rights under state and local laws, you should contact your local school board.

In addition there are Federal laws which give you and your child certain rights related to school testing. These rights are the result of laws passed by the Congress of the United States. The laws help prevent inaccurate or inappropriate decisions from being made about your child. They also provide ways for you, the parent or guardian, to be involved in making decisions about your child's education. These laws apply only to school districts that receive Federal funds for education programs.

The Family Education Rights and Privacy Act, Public Law 93-380, of 1974 gives you and your child rights related to your child's school records. The following are some rights concerning test scores contained in your child's school record.

Right to Inspect Records – You have the right to see all of your child's test results if they are part of the child's official record. You also have the right to have the test results explained to you. Written requests to see your child's test results must be honored within 45 days.

You may want to take advantage of your rights by requesting to see your child's record and all test scores and by working with the school to make sure the record is complete and accurate. If your child is over 18, only your child has the right to this request.

Right to Privacy – Under this law you also have some rights that protect the privacy of your child's official record including test scores. To find out more information about your rights under the law write to:

FERPA
330 C Street, N.W.
Room 4511, Switzer Building
Washington, D.C. 20202

Public Law 94-142, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act of 1975, and the Handicapped Rehabilitation Act of 1973 together cover rights related to testing and the use of tests only for children who may need special education services.

Right to Parent Involvement —You as a parent have the right to participate in decisions about the use of tests to plan a special education program for your child.

- o If your child is being considered for special education placement for the first time, the school must inform you in writing in the language you speak and obtain your permission before the child can be tested.

- o You have the right to challenge test scores used to plan a special program for your child if you feel the test scores are not accurate.

- o You have the right to request in writing to have your child tested by someone other than school staff, if you prefer.

- o You have the right to request a hearing, if you do not agree with the school on what services are best for your child.

Right to Fairness in Testing—Your child also has certain rights to insure a fair and accurate measure of his/her special needs. You may want to work with the school to make sure the best possible program is planned to meet your child's special needs.

- o Any test your child takes for the purposes of placement in special education must be given in the language (s)he speaks at home, whenever such a test is available.

- Your child cannot be given a test related to special placement that discriminates on the basis of race, sex, or socioeconomic status. No test can be given that is culturally biased.

- Your child must be tested with a test that meets his/her special needs. For example, if your child is blind, tests must be given in Braille or orally, if available.

- Your child must be assessed in several different ways. No one test score can be used to make decisions about your child for special education placement.

If you would like to know more about your rights and your child's rights in special education testing, write to:

Office of Special Education and Rehabilitation Services
Donahoe Building, Room 4030
400 6th Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20202

What Do Test Items Look Like?

The following are examples of the types of test questions your child may be asked on a standardized test. An asterisk (*) indicates the correct answer.

Examples of Achievement Test Questions

Grade 2
Reading Comprehension (larger type used in test booklet)

1. Read the story and then answer the questions.
   Darken the circle next to your answer.
   Choose only one answer.
   For some questions, there may seem to be more than one correct answer. In those cases, choose the *best* answer.

   Wheels are used in many ways. Some wheels help people go from one place to another. There are wheels on bikes and cars and skates that help us go. One of the wheels in a car helps the driver make the car go the right way. It is called a steering wheel. Some wheels that make things work are found on the inside of things. Many of these are called gears. Clocks and watches and motors have gears inside.

   A. What are steering wheels for?

   * O To point cars

   O To make clocks tell time

   O To make bikes go

   O To help motors work

   B. What is a good title for this story?

   O "Gears Are Wheels"

   O "Moving from Place to Place"

   * O "Wheels Are Helpful"

   O "Making Cars Go"

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C. What things have gears?

O Steering wheels

O Roller skates

* O Watches

O Hats and coats

D. Wheels are used for

O large buildings.

O nothing.

O sidewalks.

* O many things.

Grade 5

Mathematics Concepts – Determining the area of a geometric figure

2. What is the area of the figure at the right?

A. 5
B. 6
* C. 7
D. 9

□ = 1 square unit

Grade 6

Social studies and science skills – Determining facts implied by graphs, charts, tables, maps, and timelines; Determining from headings the information a graph, chart, or table yields; Computation using the information shown on graph, chart, table, or timeline.

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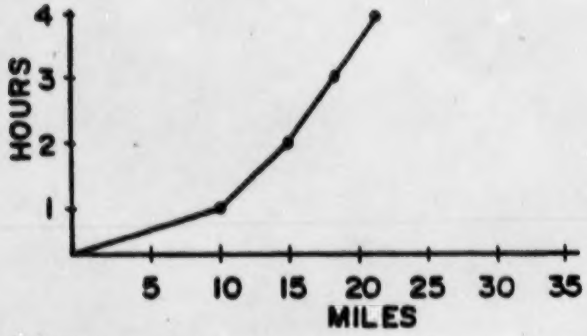
3. This graph shows how far Manuel ran Wednesday afternoon.



This graph shows_____

*A. distance and time.
B. distance and speed.
C. running and walking.
D. speed and time.

How far had Manuel run after 2 hours?

A. 2 miles
*C. 15 miles
B. 10 miles
D. 20 miles

How many hours would Manuel take to run 40 miles?

A. 4 hours
C. 8 hours
B. 6 hours
*D. can't tell

Grade 7
Vocabulary

4. Mindy will **impersonate** the principal in our class play.

A. replace
B. introduce
C. make fun of
*D. pretend to be

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Grade 8
Mathematics Computation — Fractions

5. Three of these fractions are equivalent. Mark the one that is not.

   A. 16/20 B. 20/25 C. 24/30 *D. 18/24

Grade 3-6
Spelling

6. One of the underlined words is misspelled for the way it is used in the phrase. Find the word that is not spelled correctly.

   A. **bored** by the play
   B. **sweet** candy
   C. **missed** the bus
   * D. a **cheep** price

Examples of Aptitude Test Questions

Grades 3-4
Verbal Analysis

1. **Courageous** is to **afraid** as **hire** is to
   A. money.
   B. offer.
   C. trust.
   * D. fire.

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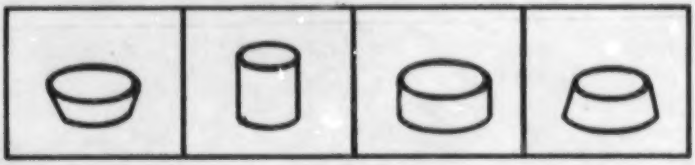
Grades 5-6
Spatial Relationships

2. The pans shown in the picture were sitting outside when it rained 2 inches. In which pan would the water be deepest?



A. *B. C. D.

Grades 7-8
Quantitative Knowledge

3. 3(2 x 4) =

*A. 24
B. 18
C. 11
D. none of these

Grades 9-12
Verbal Knowledge

4. Excavate means to
A. criticize.
B. roar.
*C. dig.
D. twist.

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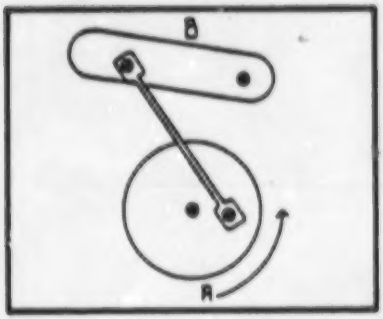
Grades 7-8
Spatial Application

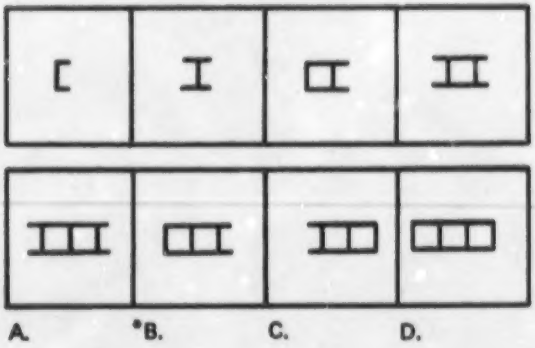
5. When the wheel A moves counterclockwise, what will happen to the bar at B?



A. It will turn clockwise.
B. It will turn counterclockwise.
* C. It will move up and down.
D. It will remain in the same position.

Grades 9-12
Spatial Analysis

6. Look at the top row of figures. They are in order from left to right. Find the figure in the bottom row that would come next.



A. *B. C. D.

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Examples of Minimum Competency Questions

DIRECTIONS: Study the Signs. Use the information to answer the items below. Mark the appropriate spaces on the answer sheet for the answers you choose.

1. This sign means:

   a. slow down

   b. turn off motor

   c. proceed with caution

   * d. make a complete stop

2. This sign means:

   a. no U turn

   * b. no right turn

   c. turn on arrow

   d. road turns ahead

3. This sign means:

   a. hiking trail ahead

   b. jogging trail ahead

   c. school crossing ahead

   * d. pedestrian crosswalk ahead

4. This sign means:

   a. hill

   * b. merge

   c. detour

   d. divided highway

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What are Some Other Sources of Information on Testing?

This guide was designed to help parents gain a better understanding of testing by highlighting some important points about testing in the schools. The guide does not present all there is to know, or all views on testing and the use of test results. For more information on testing and your child you may want to contact the following:

Director of Research
American Federation of Teachers-AFL/CIO
11 Dupont Circle
Washington, D.C. 20011

D.C. Citizens for Better Public Education
95 M Street, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20024

Instruction and Professional Development
National Education Association
1201 16th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

National Congress of Parents and Teachers
700 N. Rush Street
Chicago, Illinois 60611

Organizations that publish tests also often have information for parents on testing. You may want to write to the publisher(s) of the tests your child takes for information on testing. Several test publishers are listed on pages 5 and 6.